



Faculty Forum

From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 12, No. 7

April 1, 2000

Teaching Count\$ Reconsidered

Hal Herzog's February 1, 2000, *Faculty Forum* piece sees a problem with salary merit increases, particularly the raises directly targeted for teaching excellence. While Hal does not place all of the blame for this state of affairs on external sources, he does place most of the onus there. I suggest that we need to look internally to both identify the problem and to move in the direction of resolving it. But first a little history.

Because of public questions about the quality of academic instruction and its role in the tenure process, the Board of Governors, November 1992, referred the matter to two standing committees. As a result of their work the committees produced a report, approved by the Board September 10, 1993, titled *Tenure and Teaching in the University of North Carolina*. One of the major recommendations was to review evaluation procedures to ensure that teaching was being properly evaluated. Another was the recommendation that established the Board of Governors' Awards for Excellence in Teaching, a \$10,000 award at each of the sixteen institutions. Yet another was to ensure that the importance of teaching was specified in the mission statement. The report was immediately followed by Executive Memorandum 338, September 28, 1993, signed by then President C.D. Spangler. Memorandum 338 repeated the instructions given to the President by the Board of Governors. Part of the motivation for the Board's action was to head off any inclination by the General Assembly to meddle in these matters. The attempt failed.

In the 1995 expansion budget session the General Assembly passed House Bill 229, ratified as Chapter 24 of 1995 sessions law. Section 15.9 says, in part, "The Board of Governors shall direct constituent institutions that teaching be given primary consideration in making faculty personnel decisions regarding tenure, teaching, and promotional decisions for those positions for which teaching is the primary responsibility." Section 116.1 puts into law the mission of the University of North Carolina. It states, in part, that "Teaching and learning constitute the primary service that the university renders to society. Teaching, or instruction, is the primary responsibility of each of the constituent institutions."

Since 1995 the General Assembly has on several occasions, including 1999, earmarked funds specifically for the purpose of rewarding excellence in teaching. In a rather unique exercise the state has tied rewards to stated policy. Amazing! The intent of the policy is to focus faculty attention on how seriously external constituencies take this matter of quality teaching and, lo and behold, it is working! As Hal points out, there is serious money at stake.

There are two alternatives. The first is that the faculty could attempt to change state policy. This would entail a level of political activism that I have not seen a hint of in Western's faculty. Imagine Western's faculty going public and battling with the General Assembly declaring that the quality of instruction, and therefore student learning, is NOT our primary purpose.

Hal does point out that the faculty are to some degree culpable, but I suggest that we are more culpable than that. Given that the state has specified the policy and tied real rewards to it, the

second alternative is a course of action to ensure that the rewards are distributed to those who deserve them. In other words, let us evaluate teaching and learning in such a way that there is a degree of faith that those so rewarded are deserving. As Hal also points out, the *Faculty Handbook* gives departmental faculty the responsibility for annually reviewing and revising, as needed, the departmental AFE/TPR document. This document is supposed to be the document which contains the criteria that form the basis for personnel decisions. These criteria are signed off on, in writing, by the dean and the VCAA. As a faculty, let us insist that the properly prepared and approved criteria are the criteria by which such decisions are really made.

If the above were to be the case then the departmental AFE/TPR documents need a lot of work. I served on a committee several years ago that reviewed almost all of the departments' criteria and more than a few left much to be desired. In October 1999, the Faculty Senate approved the Task Force on Evaluating Teaching report titled *Proposed Policies for Evaluating Teaching*. In a March 15, 2000, email Vice Chancellor Collings said, "These policies will be implemented during the next academic year." Departmental faculty have a choice. The faculty can do a good job developing teaching assessment methods and criteria or it can do a poor job. To assist in this effort, I suggest that the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs hold department heads and deans accountable for the quality of the documents and the integrity of the personnel decision making process. The accountability should be such that it is visible to the faculty and perceived as fair.

Richard Stephens', *Faculty Forum*, March 1, 2000, raises the question of whether we should be evaluating the professor's teaching or the student's learning. In the March 15, 2000, *notes and quotes*, Anita Oser responded to Richard, explaining why the Task Force on Evaluating Teaching took the direction it did. A multi-dimensional evaluation of the professor's performance is certainly an improvement over what we have been doing. However, I have some empathy with Richard's position. I also know that evaluating student learning has its own pitfalls. As an institution whose rhetoric espouses the value of teaching excellence, let us explore ways to evaluate the teaching and learning relationship so that the equation contains all the variables. Evaluating only one side of the equation, whichever one it is, only tells part of the story.

Outcomes assessment is a good idea but our latest SACS accreditation report (1996) indicated that many departments have yet to develop an effective assessment plan. Could WCU faculty produce a developmental model of learning that could be used to assess the developmental impact of a course, as well as our curriculum, both in content and process? Such a model would have the capability of assessing multiple pedagogies, compared to most current assessments which focus on teaching as "telling." If we could simultaneously focus on teacher learning and student learning, perhaps we could find the instrument that would make short work of this unruly knot.

One other action that the faculty can take is to revise the way teaching awards are determined. There is good reason to believe that some teaching award finalists are the result of successful manipulation. Teaching awards, merit money, or any other personnel decision should not be based on behind-the-scenes shenanigans. Teaching awards should be based on proper and careful assessments of merit. The faculty should insist on it.

The larger question of salary inequities will certainly not be resolved by much better evaluation of teaching, but it could certainly be a big step.

Bill Kane, Management

The opinions printed here belong solely to the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the editorial staff or of the Faculty Center. If you would like to respond, e-mail Nienhuis by the 8th of the month.